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ABSTRACT

Strengthening and changing the curriculum to meet the needs of the inner-city child must be done by recognizing both the cultural aspects of the child's environment and the actual problems that he faces rather than by imposing traditional middle-class values, activities, and language. Steps suggested to both the teacher and the parent for improving the meaning vocabulary of inner-city children are (1) talk to the child, (2) listen to the child, (3) read to the child, (4) teach sequentially specific word recognition skills, (5) take the child on trips, (6) build a reading atmosphere for the child, (7) encourage the child to join the public library, (8) buy and make word games and puzzles for the child, (9) praise the child, and (10) give the child responsibilities which he is capable of taking. A sequence of specific word recognition skills and grade levels, an Afro-American vocabulary list, and references are included. (CM)

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"Improving the Meaning Vocabulary of Inner-City Children"

Session: Working with the Urban Disadvantaged

Thursday, May 1, 10:45 - 11:45 A.M,

Music Hall, Auditorium

RE002 337

Identification:

Inner-city children are those who live in poverty-stricken urban neighborhoods in most United States cities. The majority are Negroes, some of Latin-American background and a few are members of other ethnic minorities. The family into which these children are born is usually a member of a particular group or class and the cultural environment is almost always circumscribed by this factor. "Human nature" has been defined as "culture nature" and since each group or class develops its own culture these children learn their culture from their identification with the environment. These learnings in a particular culture are strengthened by association with family members and peer relationships. Since there are strong limitations of mobility from this group or class these children are denied full social participation. They are thus also described as "culturally deprived". Robert Havighurst states that the deprived may fall into four groups. 1. Affectional deprivation - the person is deprived of an adequate amount of affection, love, or emotional support; 2. Model-person deprivation - the absence of persons in a child's life who are good examples for the child to imitate as he grows up; 3. Intellectual deprivation - the lack of a home environment in which books and newspapers are read, where there is little or no discussion of books, politics, music or similar intellectual activities; and 4. Nutritional deprivation - the child is not getting an adequate amount of food.

This definition* points up that we must consider each one of these children as a "whole person" - carefully scrutinizing the emotional, social, intellectual and physical development.

Curriculum:

The school is an institution of society and as such reflects the nature of the culture of which it is a part. In the United States the schools are largely dominated by middle-class teachers and administrators. Because of this, the culture of the school reflects the controlling ideas, values, and sentiments held by people of this class. The objectives stressed, the subject matter provided through what is believed to embrace the most significant and universal knowledges, skills and ideas and the types of problems and activities faced point to the goals and objectives of middle-class values. Such a limiting curriculum threatens the culturally deprived child and impedes his fullest growth since it violates some basic principles of learning, such as: 1. recognition of individual differences, 2. importance of starting with the learner where he is, 3. importance of linking vicarious experiences with first hand experiencing, 4. importance of motivation in relation to genuine learning,

* Stanley E. Dimond, "Citizenship and the Role of Education for the Culturally Deprived". Education for World Leadership. Evanston, Ill., National School Boards Association Yearbook, 1960, p.260.

and 5. the need for the learner to share in the planning of curricular experiences. Furthermore, the present curriculum is based upon traditional activities and skills, arbitrarily taken from middle-class culture with emphasis upon the West European culture and languages. Such subject matter does not deal with the kinds of ongoing problems faced by most children coming from culturally deprived homes and communities. (7)

Method:

Strengthening and changing the curriculum to meet the needs of the inner-city child involves participation of both the teacher and the parent. In order to improve the meaning vocabulary of inner-city children the teacher in the classroom and the parent in the home must:

1. Talk to the child: Almost from the day he is born, a child is ready to express himself. At first he will respond by cooing and gurgling. Later he will pick up a few words and sense the rhythm of language. It is the teacher's responsibility to help the child add words to his speaking vocabulary. The more words used naturally in his ordinary conversation, the more words will have meaning for him when he sees them on the printed page. The parent role can be more definitive because there is clearly a lack of sustained interaction with adult

members of the family. Rarely do inner-city youngsters regularly eat one meal with one or both parents. They usually eat alone or with brothers and sisters. This robs them of one of the important socializing and intellectually stimulating experiences of childhood. According to Bossard and Boll,* the family meal is a focus for a number of important emotional, cultural and educational experiences. Participation and interaction with significant others in an organized way helps shape the personality and sensitizes the participants to each other's needs and inclinations. Organized conversation helps shape vocabulary, influences the development of verbal facility and subtlety and determines a whole set of complex attitudes and feelings about the use of language. The family meal also serves as an acculturating agency, for, in their interaction the members teach each other and develop a way of seeing themselves and the world in which they live. The family meal has been described as a forum, as a clearing house for information, as a school for life and as an opportunity to act out deeper personality needs. Such experiences are usually absent in the lives of inner-city children. (3)

2. Listen to the child: Children must have many opportunities to express themselves. The teacher should encourage each child to talk about things he has seen or done. The more

* J.H.S. Bossard and E.S.Boll, "The Sociology of Child Development", New York: Harper, 1960 Chap.13.

the child talks, the better he is likely to read. Adults must pay attention when a child is speaking. The parent should listen to the child read. Suggest that before he reads aloud that he should read the story to himself to be sure that he knows all the words. This makes listening to him read more interesting. Topol, the Israeli actor blames much of the world conflict on the lack of communication — the technical know how of talking, listening, doing, thinking, acting and laughing. Loretan and Umans state that for inner-city children the listening skills now take on more importance because there are more things to listen to and for. In addition, the teacher should remember that listening should be taught in connection with the other language arts - reading, writing, speaking - rather than as an isolated skill, since each is dependent upon the other. (4) The Department of School Services and Publications of Wesleyan University has classified listening habits into seven categories, they are as follows:

a) attentive listening - when there is strong interest and great motivation.

b) accurate listening - when listening is encouraged by clear-cut, clearly understood, specific items for which to listen.

c) critical listening - when the pupil thinks as he listens.

d) selective listening - when a pupil listens for statements that please him or suit his purpose and tends to ignore other statements. This kind of listening can have both good and bad results.

e) appreciative listening - when an emotional reaction is appropriate.

f) uncomprehending listening - when a pupil hears but does not comprehend. This type of listening may be traced to a number of causes: poor attention, poor vocabulary, failure to understand concepts, limited experience background, or inadequate listening readiness.

g) marginal listening - when "half listening", the pupil allows his attention to wander, and the teacher must pull his attention back repeatedly.*

3. Read to the child: Everytime a child is read to, the teacher or parent is building an auditory vocabulary and an appreciation of books and reading. A child who has been read to is usually more anxious to read himself. Reading can become more important while re-inforcing the listening skill. Oral discussion after the reading session motivated through skillful questioning can help to sharpen the speaking skill.

* Department of Social Services and Publications, "The Improvement of Listening Skills", Curriculum Letter No. 41 (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University, Oct. 1959)

Adults should remember when making a selection of material to be read that the child's listening and interest levels are above his reading level.

4. Help the child to build a vocabulary: The teacher must teach sequentially the following categories of word recognition skills: Word Meaning Skills, Ear training and Phonetic Analysis Skills, Word Structure Skills and Dictionary Usage Skills. (detailed listing available in reference section). The parent must tell the child the words if he is in the beginning stages. If he is in a later stage, must help him to work out the word by: e.g. looking at and discussing the picture, skipping over the unknown word and reading the rest of the sentence to see whether this suggests a new word, checking to see whether the word makes "sense" in the sentence. After the basics have been mastered and the pupil moves on through the middle school to graduate from high school he may find himself in the same position as Willie Lee Jackson of Watts, California. Jackson, a high school graduate of average learning ability and a black, applied for a routine assembly-line job. After meeting all of the other requirements, he enthusiastically took the written exam - a widely used personnel test devised in 1942. It's supposed to be a "culture-free" measure of intelligence, but because Jackson didn't know the meaning of "R.S.V.P." and had trouble with proverbs like "Many a good cow hath a bad calf",

he was labeled a hard-core unemployed. Adrian Dove, a sociologist was at this time working on a special committee on testing trying to locate a "culture-free" intelligence test. He felt that the measurable aspects of intelligence are so interwoven with culture that the only fair way was to devise separate tests for separate cultures. Dove had just finished writing such a test, with a bias in favor of the ghetto dweller - found Jackson - gave him the test. Jackson passed it strong but the white middle-class employers did not. These middle-class whites commented: if suddenly tomorrow everyone had to pass such a test based on ghetto culture there would be an outcry from the "culturally disadvantaged" non-ghetto dwellers complaining of discrimination and cultural bias. The charge would be justified. Yet in personnel offices all over the country, many intelligent black applicants are being rejected because they haven't been raised in the white culture. Black has been identified for Negroes as their mind color, and Afro-American is their culture and language. Afro-American is popularly known as SOUL, and is an evolving culture that is indigenous to this land but separate too. SOUL has been identified as many things - as everything that happens in the black experience, in church, nightclub or university. It's un-Soulful to try

and define SOUL but let us pause and consider words. Language, as noted, is one element of the black man's life that is within control of the black community itself. The Afro-American has a vocabulary all his own. The inner-city child is exposed to this vocabulary and often develops the habit of using it exclusively or mixes it with the patterns learned in school. Every alert teacher should be aware of this and should familiarize himself with the words and their meanings. (sample listing available in reference section) (2)

5. Take the child on trips. Even a walk in the neighborhood or a short ride on the bus or subway will excite his curiosity and stimulate his interest in the world around him. Point out interesting sights thus giving him new words and meanings for words. En route be sure to read names, signs and labels. Involve the child in conversation and discussion. In choosing your own words be sure to include word pictures, synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, etc. Evoke the five senses.

6. Build a reading atmosphere for the child. In the classroom and at home have books, magazines and newspapers. Let the child see you reading and encourage him to do the same. Guide the child to better television programs and educational movies. Tune in to thought provoking programs that share worthwhile information as well as entertainment.

Check the newspaper listings for these programs. Be consistent in your selection. Children are imitative. Inner-city homes contain both radio and television sets and they utilize both media regularly and frequently. This often heightens the lack of sustained interaction with the adult members of the family but children between the ages of five and thirteen, years crucial for the acquisition of skills and information, may in this manner develop any talents they may possess.

7. Encourage the child to join the Public Library.

The teacher should have a class library. She should familiarize the pupils with the school and public libraries. Teach what the library is, what it is used for and what it contains. Guide the child in his selection of books. Encourage him to progress from less difficult as he gains confidence to more difficult. Parents who do not belong to the Public Library should join with the child.

8. Buy and make a word games and puzzles for the child.

These help in learning shapes and forms. It aids the child in relating words to things. Anagrams, letter games, scrabble, and letto also help with spelling and reading. Parents are encouraged to make simple word games by cutting words and pictures from magazines to be matched together. Make word cards for troublesome words: e.g. was, there, what, went, etc. Play the word games with the child.

9. Praise the child. Remember that learning new words is a difficult task. When a child succeeds - praise him. Don't expect him to know the word when you teach or tell it once or twice or sometimes even ten or twenty times. Some children need more repetition than this.

10. Give the child responsibilities which he is capable of taking. This allows him to earn recognition and to get real satisfaction from accomplishments. Donald H. Clark states: Many children come from darkened slums, neglected by hope-bereft parents. School teachers are failing to teach them but though these children fail to learn from teachers, they do succeed in learning from each other. In Oakland, at Stonehurst School, a large number of sixth graders are excused from their classes for 45 minutes a day to work with first graders. This involves perhaps more personal attention for the little ones than they have ever had. Their teachers wisely have prescribed no curriculum. Each child, out of his own sensitivity to his partner, seems to work out the right thing to do.* This buddy system could be set up in a classroom with the brighter, more advanced pupils helping those who are underachievers. At home sibling rivalry can often be circumvented by using this same technique in allowing the older brother or sister to help the younger.

* Donald H. Clark, edited by, "The Psychology of Education", The Free Press, New York, 1967, p.130.

Implementation and Expansion:

Assuming that kindergarteners' learning suffers from early impoverishment in verbal and cognitive experiences, pre-school programs for 3 and 4 year olds are being tested. Richer than the usual nursery school activity, the curriculum aims to develop cognitive and sensory motor skills, auditory and visual perception and discrimination, motor coordination, observation skills and ability to understand and follow directions. The coordination of verbal experiences and enrichment activities seeks to raise the vocabulary level, the motivation for school achievement and to enhance the learning - how - to- learn skills. In some instances an accompanying program for mothers promotes home management and child care, as well as understanding of the educational enterprise. As the child grows older a variety of techniques are employed including experimentation with methods, materials, groupings and special personnel. New emphasis in elementary, middle and high schools stresses deepening insights and skills in human relations as a supplement to academic skills. Specific methods appropriate to the program's objectives include role playing, open-ended stories, reporting, interviewing, storytelling, dramatization, and the use of audio-visual aids for human understanding. Special modifications have even been made for potential school drop-outs. The work-study program,

in which youth are placed and supervised in part-time jobs has proved helpful. Employment experiences are then dovetailed with work-oriented English, social studies, mathematics and guidance experiences. One of the most recent techniques of developing divergent thinking abilities of inarticulate youngsters indicates a new trend in instructional emphasis. This emphasis is on encouragement of children to think outside the conventional verbal channels and to use intuitive thinking, curiosity, exploration, and guessing rather than memorized rote verbal responses.* In order to improve the meaning vocabulary of inner-city children teachers and parents must bear in mind that these children thrive on stimulation, motivation, care, interest and challenging content material. They need constant exposure not confining enclosure.

* Passow, A. Harry, "Education in Depressed Areas" Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1966. p. 344 ff.

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WORD RECOGNITION SKILLS *

Word Meaning Skills	Grades
Matching words with pictures	1-6
Inferring meanings from pictures and context clues	1-6
Classifying words according to meanings	1-6
Studying words with more than one meaning	1-6
Recognizing antonyms	1-6
Recognizing homonyms	2-6
Recognizing synonyms	2-6
Studying prefixes, suffixes, and roots	3-6
Recognizing figurative language and idiomatic expressions	3-6
Studying typographical aids to meaning	4-6

Ear Training and Phonetic Analysis Skills	
Recognizing rhyming words	1-6
Recognizing consonant sounds	1-6
Recognizing common phonetic elements	1-6
Recognizing common consonant blends	1-6
Changing first or last consonant to make a new word	1-6
Recognizing consonant digraphs	1-6
Recognizing variant sounds of consonants	2-6
Knowing long and short sounds of vowels	2-6

Ear Training and Phonetic Analysis Skills (Continued)	Grades
Recognizing vowel digraphs and diphthongs	2-6
Recognizing the visual clues to vowel sounds	2-6
Word Structure Skills	
Recognizing and using inflected forms (for example: adding s, ed)	1-6
Recognizing root words in inflected forms	1-6
Recognizing compound words	1-6
Recognizing contractions	2-6
Forming plurals by changing root or doubling consonant	2-6
Adding commonest suffixes to roots	2-6
Recognizing root words in derived forms	2-6
Adding commonest prefixes to roots	3-6
Dividing words into syllables	3-6
Recognizing the use of accent	4-6
Dictionary Usage Skills	
Alphabetizing	3-6
Using guide words	4-6
Using the pronunciation key	4-6
Using the pronunciation guide	4-6
Respelling for pronunciation	4-6
Choosing definitions from multiple meanings	4-6
Using syllabic division and accent	4-6
Using the various parts of the dictionary	4-6

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AFRO-AMERICAN VOCABULARY*
*Taken from Soul Story by Adrian Dove.

Big juice — a big-time white racketeer, believed to enjoy police protection.

Blow — The message of a person's conversation; what he said that particular time. Synonym: rap.

Burn — To improvise superlatively, in music or in life. The phrase "Burn, baby." was shouted at singers and orators long before the riot in Watts. During the riot, it became a pun.

Burner — The tops in his field, whatever his field is.

Changes, going through some - Having difficulties; regularly on the receiving end of bad news.

Chest, trying to get some - Looking for a fight.

Dap — Impeccably attired. Synonym: clean.

Down — Something so good it's out of sight, the best ever.

Dozens, playing the - A contest to see which young brother can remember or make up the greatest number of obscene, rhymed couplets reflecting on the opponent's parents. Sometimes called "signifying" or "mamma talk." Sometimes done with finger-snapping accompaniment. Though it may start in fun, it often attracts a crowd of admirers, and

AFRO-AMERICAN VOCABULARY (Continued)

it can easily end in a fight. Not approved by parents.

Dues — Those unpleasant things which somehow, some day, are supposed to become blessings in disguise. Summed up by the saying, "if it ain't good to you, it must be good for you."

For days — Forever and until eternity.

Fox — Beautiful female.

Gig — A job. Synonyms: slave, hustle.

Hog — Any large automobile.

Heavy — An extremely intelligent person. But with a slight change in inflection, an extremely stupid person.

Hummer — A nothing person or event.

Jive — An unreliable person. A persuasive talker, quick to make commitments but prone to lie and make excuses for not delivering. Always late but always with an excuse.

Lame — A socially backward, clumsy person. Synonym: square.

Main man — A woman's boyfriend; a man's closest friend. Feminine form: main squeeze.

Member — An Afro-American, or Soul brother.

AFRO-AMERICAN VOCABULARY (Continued)

Pig	A frightened, sadistic and corrupt individual who happens to be a policeman. He may be white or black, but most blacks are adjudged not qualified.
Set	A close gathering, usually good.
Together	A person or event near perfection. Synonym: ready. ("We made this down set in Vegas last week, and it was together".)
Twisted	To do time in the penitentiary. Someone who says he twisted behind a hummer means, he did the time but he didn't do the crime.
Whale	To run very fast, think very clearly or be in any way a righteous burner.